

Why Do They Hate Dixie?

“Howard Dean wants the white trash vote,” wrote *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer in mockery of the Vermonter. “[T]hat’s clearly what [Dean]

meant when he said he wanted the votes of ‘guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks.’”

After Dean was savaged by Al Sharpton, who called the Confederate flag an “American swastika,” Krauthammer was rhapsodic. His humiliation serves Dean right, Krauthammer chortled. He should never have pandered to Southern “yahoos” and “rebel-yelling racist redneck[s].”

What is it in the wiring of these neocons that they so loathe white Southerners who cherish the monuments, men, and memories of the Lost Cause?

Last December, Krauthammer, David Frum, and Jonah Goldberg squabbled noisily over who was first to join the media mob that lynched Trent Lott for his tribute to Senator Thurmond on Strom’s 100th birthday. When Lott lost his leadership post, these neocons reveled.

Why the Hollywood Left hates Dixie is easy to understand. It is conservative, Christian, traditionalist, hostile to the cultural revolution. But why do the neocons? After all, the folks Krauthammer calls “white trash,” are the most reliable conservative voters in America, God-and-country people. They enlist in disproportionate numbers in the military and die in disproportionate numbers in America’s wars.

The neocons are pro-Israel. So, too, are these folks who believe in standing by Israel because the Bible tells them so. Yet, when it comes to Southerners who revere the Confederate flag, neocons like Krauthammer echo that *Washing-*

ton Post writer who dismissed white Southern Christians as “poor, uneducated and easy to command.”

Yet, even the *Post* did not use the venom Krauthammer employed. Indeed, I never heard George Wallace or Lester Maddox, whom I came to know late in their lives, use the kind of language on political foes that Krauthammer uses on people he doesn’t even know.

A point of personal privilege: I have family roots in the South, in Mississippi. When the Civil War came, Cyrus Baldwin enlisted and did not survive Vicksburg. William Buchanan of Okolona, who would marry Baldwin’s daughter, fought at Atlanta and was captured by General Sherman. William Baldwin Buchanan was the name given to my father and by him to my late brother.

As a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, I have been to their gatherings. I spoke at the 2001 SCV convention in Lafayette, La. The Military Order of the Stars and Bars presented me with a battle flag and a wooden canteen like the ones my ancestors carried.

Has Krauthammer been to one of these meetings? Has he any knowledge of these people he calls “white trash”?

Discussing the Dean-flag issue, one *New York Times* columnist wrote of the campaign “to remove the Stars and Bars from the top of the South Carolina Statehouse.” But it was not the Stars and Bars, first flag of the Confederate States of America, that flew over that statehouse. It was the battle flag of the Confederate army, with St. Andrew’s Cross

on it, on which, tradition holds, the apostle Andrew was crucified.

And that flag atop the statehouse flew beneath Old Glory. What were South Carolinians saying by putting it there? Only this: “We are proud of the bravery of our grandfathers who fought under this blood-stained banner, but we are Americans and the Stars and Stripes represents our country now and forever.”

What is wrong with that?

To Krauthammer the battle flag is a racist symbol. And, yes, it has been used by racists to insult and intimidate. But so, too, has the Christian cross when it was burned on hillsides. And so, too, has the American flag.

These symbols are abused because they have power. But to Southern kids who put battle-flag decals on book bags, and their fathers who put replicas on cars and trucks, it does not mean they hate anyone. It means: “We love our Southern heritage and we shall never forget our ancestors who fought and died under this flag.”

Late in life, Joshua Chamberlain, the Union hero who won the Medal of Honor for holding Little Round Top when Lee sent the Texans to turn Meade’s flank on the second day at Gettysburg, said that whenever he saw that flag, it recalled to him the indomitable courage of the men who had fought under it. At re-enactments of Civil War battles, high-school football games, and NASCAR races, that flag is ubiquitous across the South.

If Krauthammer and the neocons really believe the only folks who cherish this symbol are “white trash” and “yahoos,” that tells us more about them than it does about the South, of which they know nothing. ■